

Greetings,

I testified before House Appropriations yesterday and the new House Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee on Wednesday. I know that has created much anxiety as to our future and what this may mean for you and your future.

I'd like to provide you with some clarifying information relative to my remarks this week in hopes that this will help provide an accurate perspective. Given the environment that we are in, I will make frequent communications with you as we move through the legislative session a priority.

We have proposed a long term plan to transition away from our current secure facilities to additional smaller facilities located closer to population centers and closer to kids' home communities. This is really not a new concept and has been discussed in Texas for a number of years. What brings it to the forefront today is the belief supported by much research that outcomes improve when kids are in smaller, less institutional facilities closer to their families and home communities as long as their behavioral and treatment can be met.

The long term plan I am proposing to the Legislature keeps a strong state-operated facility presence in Texas, but shifts from the model we have today, to more regionalized, smaller facilities. Even if this plan is adopted by the legislature, there will still be a need for a centralized O&A operation as well other special populations we have to maintain for kids who cannot always function adequately or safely in general population. There's the issue of our vocational programs too and we certainly would not want to lose any ground there. In fact, we are seeking to expand those programs this legislative session.

Please note that this plan would unfold over 6-8 years. Further, I do not support a reduction of any of our facilities until we have the results of a feasibility study to determine a long term plan for regional facilities, how many facilities, how big, to provide what services, how all that would be staged in over a period of years, whether any of our existing facilities could and should be considered in that plan, and much more. We are asking the legislature to fund such a study and to give us ample time to get it done and submit it for consideration when the NEXT legislature convenes IN 2017.

There is nothing in what we have proposed that would result in any changes to our facility footprint until the end of the next biennium (August 2017). By that time, and only IF our population justifies it, would a facility become inactive. We are referring to this as a possible closure due to attrition. I don't support any reductions in staff before that time and then, ONLY if our population justifies it. If that does come to be, it is my goal that we will have a position in this agency to offer each and every displaced employee.

Even though we have made this proposal, we have also asked for an additional 429 facility-based staff to create a staffing model in our facilities that provides for adequate health and safety measures for kids and employees. While the transition to a regional model looks ahead to the future, our request for these positions addresses our needs today and for the foreseeable future.

This proposal is not intended to reflect poorly on your good work, so please do not look at this proposal as a comment on that at all. It is not. You are experts at what you do. You are professionals and for those of you who have been here for any length of time, you have great perseverance. Most of you have exceptionally difficult jobs-you take care of and educate the state's most challenging population, in my opinion, of any group the state deals with, children or adults. The proposal only relates to the model we

currently have which has been in place for so many years. Research, time and time again, tells us that what we have, the old model (large, aging, not suitably configured facilities, with large campus' to maintain, considerable distances from population centers where so many resources are more readily available) will not result in the best possible outcomes for kids and for the state. And that is our mission.

Within the context of moving to a new model, you are likely to be hearing more and more about our cost per day which is very high. In fact, it costs about \$160,000 per kid, per year, in state secure facilities. We do not believe, without a different model, we can make significant inroads into those costs.

Aside from the hearings you may have watched this week, we have had and will continue to have thorough one-on-one conversations with legislators and key staff about the future of juvenile justice in Texas. I can tell you from these meetings the past few weeks that your work is recognized and valued. From the visits many legislators and staff have made to our facilities over the past several months, they invariably come away from that with a new respect for the agency and for the very difficult work you do. So again, the proposal is not about you and it is not a subtle message that you are not valued and/or that you are easily expendable. The proposal is about this state needing now to continue the reforms begun several years ago, move to the next phase and transition to a model that will give the kids the best possible chance of success. Texas is not the only state that has dealt with this dilemma and we hope to learn from the experience of others in this process.

If the transition I am proposing is adopted, the transition will be gradual, well thought out and planned, research-based, and done in an effort to serve our kids better. And the new regional model will need your expertise. It would likely provide opportunities to be in different locations, but perhaps even stay where you are. But there is much to evolve before any of those questions can be addressed.

The legislature is just now beginning to swing into high gear and during the next 3 months much will occur, you will be hearing many things from many different sources. Rumors will abound and we will do our level best to communicate with you frequently during the session. We will oppose any recommendation that we close a facility in the short run if it means just moving the kids to the remaining four facilities. We won't know how all this shakes out until the end of session. We are only at the beginning of the process.

Again, as I stated in my Feb 9th email to you, an uncertain future is not comfortable and we will strive to keep you updated frequently with accurate information. But just know that things will likely be swinging in different directions for a while and until the session is over nothing is really definite.

I hope this has helped in providing you with information you need to understand where things stand and where we are in this process.

Please feel free to ask questions throughout this period of time and we will respond with the best information we have.

Thanks and I hope each of you will have a good weekend.

David